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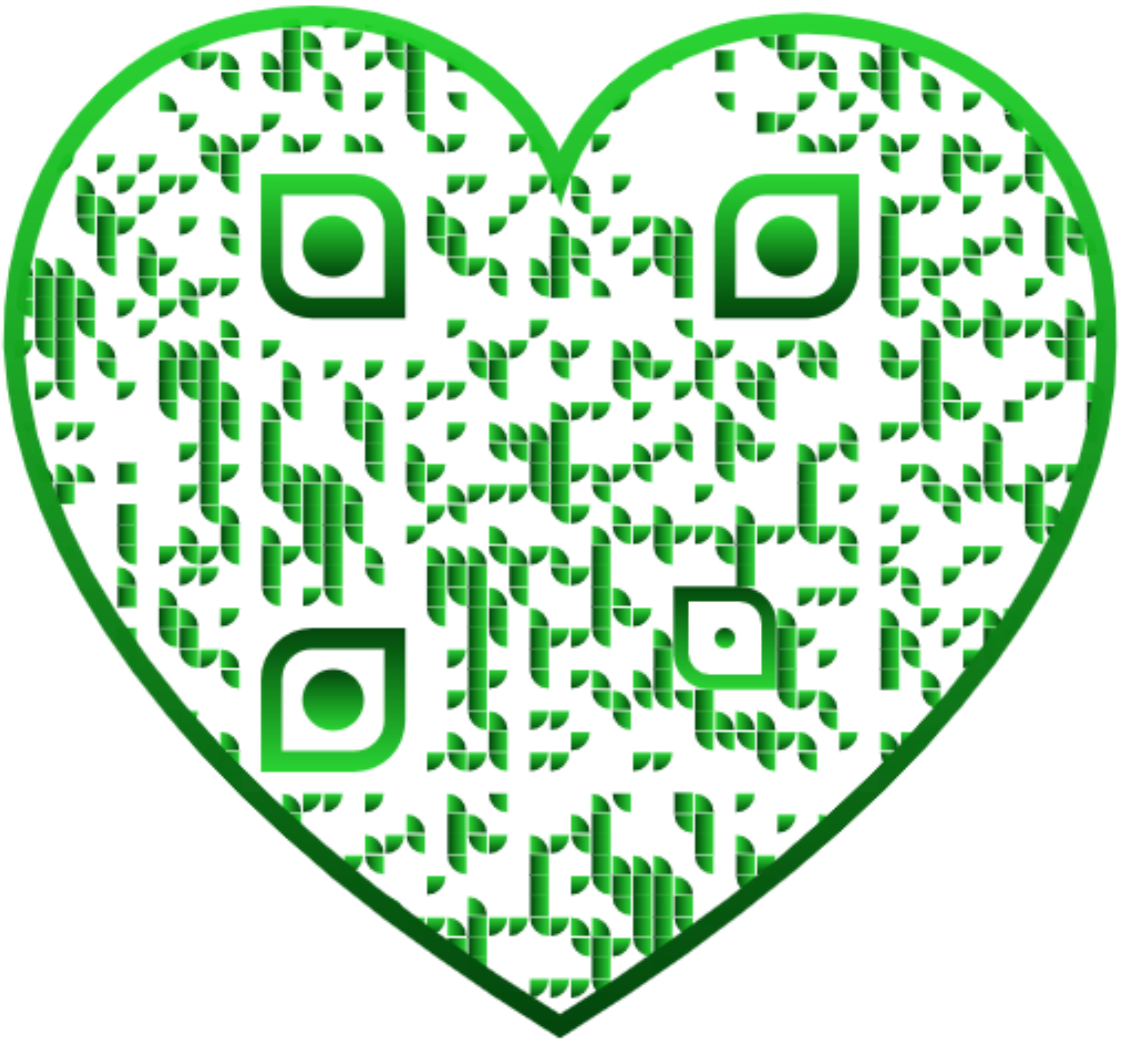
BABA VANGA

THE CONTROVERSIAL LIFE AND LEGACY OF THE INFLUENTIAL BULGARIAN MYSTIC

CHARLES RIVER EDITORS



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Baba Vanga: The Controversial Life and Legacy of the Influential Bulgarian Mystic

By Charles River Editors

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Introduction

A picture of Baba Vanga in old age

People’s timeless captivation with those supposedly endowed with supernatural powers – these gifted individuals oftentimes regarded as gods walking among everyone else – is a fascinating phenomenon in itself. Soothsayers and clairvoyants were particularly revered in past centuries, even by royals, nobles, and other influential figures, who placed oracles, mediums, and mystics in their retinues and sought counsel from them on a regular basis. Queen Elizabeth I, for example, famously appointed controversial polymath and occultist John Dee as her personal adviser. Various American presidents, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, are also known to have worked with psychics and spiritualists on at least one occasion.

Needless to say, prophetic predictions regarding large-scale, epoch-making events that reportedly came to pass have only further cemented the convictions of believers, and in some cases, these stunning revelations have even caused skeptics to review their positions. Nostradamus, a 16 th century

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physician, astrologer, sage, and seer, is perhaps the most renowned clairvoyant in history, as he apparently forecasted numerous transformative affairs centuries ahead of his time. In one such prophesy, he referenced “a young child born of poor people from the depths of the West of Europe, who would go on to “seduce a great troop by his tongue,” which many now believe alluded to the rise of Adolf Hitler.

While Nostradamus remains the most famous, a legendary prophet grew up further east during the 20 th century. Known by millions of followers as the beloved Baba Vanga, she was a blind mystic often called the “Balkan Nostradamus.” Despite her extremely humble beginnings, minimal education, and the seemingly endless string of hardships she suffered in her early life, the resilient, insightful, and peerlessly intuitive Vanga achieved global fame and recognition with her otherworldly visions and frighteningly accurate prophecies, attracting scores of domestic and international visitors from all walks of life, ranging from fellow villagers to celebrities and foreign dignitaries who clung on to her every word. The loyalty of her fan base, many of whom continue to spread forth her predictions and invaluable pearls of wisdom over 20 years after her death, is a testament to her prowess, especially in the present, when skepticism and cynicism have become the norm.

Baba Vanga: The Controversial Life and Legacy of the Influential Bulgarian Mystic examines her life, her prophecies, and arguments over her legacy. Along with pictures depicting important people, places, and events, you will learn about Baba Vanga like never before.

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A Gift Like No Other

In 2020, the world was struck by the seemingly irrepressible outbreak of COVID-19, which emerged in Wuhan, China in late 2019 and quickly began its global proliferation. With the exception of a handful of nations such as Taiwan and New Zealand, which succeeded in conquering the wretched virus early on, the rest of the world was brought to a virtual standstill. Even as vaccines began to be distributed, many densely populated cities remained in varying stages of lockdown and instituted tighter restrictive measures in response to an increase in infections and the discovery of new, more infectious variants of the virus. At least 96 million individuals across 219 countries and territories have been infected, with a staggering 2.05 million – a number that continues to climb – succumbing to the virus. Millions of individuals have lost their jobs and livelihoods thanks to the shuttering of countless small businesses and the floundering of major economic sectors around the world.

This devastatingly destructive pandemic came as a complete shock to world leaders, field experts, and civilians alike, not necessarily because of its arrival, but due more to its longevity and lasting consequences. Multiple veteran specialists concurred that they had never seen anything like this detestable contagion, and as such, they were admittedly uncertain about how to best tackle and contain the pestilence, which explains the confusion regarding mask-wearing and other conflicting preventative pointers issued by the authorities in the early months of the pandemic.

There was, however, one person who saw this coming, or so the story goes. That individual was not an impeccably lettered, seasoned epidemiologist with decades of experience under their belt, nor did this individual even live to see the 21 st century. This disastrous pandemic was allegedly forecasted by none other than the legendary blind mystic Baba Vanga roughly 30 years before it unfolded.

In late March of 2020, a 73-year-old ex-rhythmic gymnast and coach named Neshka Stefanova Robeva contacted local journalists and recounted her encounter with Vanga in the early 1990s, during which the soothsayer imparted to her a cryptic message. According to Robeva, “Aunt Vanga

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predicted when I visited her years ago: 'Neshka, the Corona will be all over us.'," said Robeva. "I did not realize what those words meant then." Robeva understandably misinterpreted Vanga's vague and therefore all the more ominous message. As the word "Corona" was incidentally the Bulgarian term for "crown," which is often associated with governance and guardianship, Robeva surmised that Vanga was warning them about the return of the Bulgarian Communist Party and their authoritarian regime, or perhaps Russia's global domination. The thought of "Corona" having anything to do with a virulent disease that would turn the whole world upside down never even came close to entering the realms of possibility. The connection of these dots, unfortunately, came far too late.

Other publications claimed that Vanga foresaw COVID-19 as early as the 1970s, specifically cautioning her followers on the rise of a new contagion in the coronavirus family in the first decades of the 21 st century, but that she had mistakenly attributed the source of "Corona" to Africa instead of China.

Not surprisingly, the stories, which were published by various publications and circulated on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, have since been dismissed as nothing more than "click-bait tabloid fodder" by far more reputable sources. That being said, the mere fact that such absurd, far-fetched claims would carry any weight at all in this day and age, when skepticism towards psychics and awareness of scams overall are at an all-time high, is a testament to Vanga's enduring fame and influence, as well as the apparent credibility of the clairvoyant's predictions, which her followers believe had an accuracy rate of up to 85%.

What was it about Baba Vanga that set her apart from other soothsayers both past and present? How did someone who came from such an obscure village in the Balkans become an international household name? Why were her prophetic visions so highly coveted and trusted by both the domestic and international public, so much so that she was eventually officially employed by the Bulgarian state? To better understand Baba Vanga's effortless prowess and unrivaled abilities, it is necessary to look at the modest, yet striking and eventful years of her early life, which were every bit as riveting as her remarkable career.

Baba Vanga was born Vangeliya Pandeva Dimitrova (in other sources,

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credited as Vangelia Pandeva Gushterova) on January 31 st , 1911 in a small, quaint farming village in the city of Strumica. It may be helpful to note that Strumica was a domain of the Ottoman Empire at the time of her conception and birth, but was ceded to Bulgaria the following year; the city is now located in the southeastern part of North Macedonia.

In most aspects, there was nothing particularly extraordinary about her ancestral lineage or immediate family. They were a typical lower-class family that subscribed to the traditional Orthodox faith. Her father, 38-year-old Pando Surchev, a native of Novo Selo in the Strumica region, was an underground IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) activist who was arrested and confined in the Turkish-run Edi Kule prison in Thessaloniki, Greece sometime between his late 20s and early 30s, and was only liberated in 1908 following the Young Turk Revolution. Two years later, he settled in Strumica, where he met and married Vanga's mother, Paraskeva Surcheva, a pretty young maiden who worked on a collective farm. Apart from Pando's political activism, there was little else of note in terms of accomplishment or scandal in Vanga's family. In other words, neither of her predecessors on both sides of the family possessed any unusual talents, much less the power of clairvoyance or any other divine, supernatural gifts sent from above.

Now, it seemed that the cards were stacked against Vanga from the very beginning. For starters, hers was a premature birth. She was far smaller and bonier than average newborns, and her quivering, delicate frame was riddled with physiological irregularities. As she was not expected to survive, her parents swaddled her in a warm sheepskin blanket and rested her underneath the oven in the kitchen, essentially waiting for the doomed newborn to pass on peacefully. The soundless and practically motionless newborn was deliberately left nameless, so as to prevent her parents from growing too attached to her, and to dampen the grief and pain that would ensue when she inevitably died. Fortunately, against all odds, a loud, gurgling cry spilled forth from under the oven two months later.

It was only then that Vanga's overjoyed parents set out to choose a name for her. They exchanged and vetoed suggestions for days, but they were unable to reach a compromise. Stumped, Paraskeva solicited and shopped around

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potential names from relatives and friends. One proposed the name “Andromache,” which derived from the Greek words “man” and “battle,” and was the name of the wife of fabled Trojan hero, Hector. Paraskeva shot it down then and there, finding the name's flamboyance off-putting. She rejected numerous other disappointing suggestions before a family friend finally came up with the perfect name for the plucky, blessed newborn: Vangeliya, which translates to “bearer of good news,” “good messenger,” or simply “gospel” in English.

The following day, Vanga was brought to the village church and formally christened with her new name, which would soon prove to be ideally suited to the child in more ways than one. “Vanga” was, naturally, short for “Vangeliya.”

Contrary to popular belief, despite Vanga's many health complications resulting from her premature delivery, she was not born blind. In fact, she soon plumped up and recovered from her ailments, and she was a healthy, active young girl with bouncy honey-blonde curls and bright chocolate-brown eyes. Sadly, the child's natural insouciance and innocence were tarnished by a spate of tragedies.

For one, Vanga lost her mother at the tender age of three. A year later came the outbreak of World War I, which saw Pando conscripted by the Kingdom of Bulgaria and dispatched to the Serbian battlefronts, where he fought on the side of the Central Powers. During Pando's absence, which stretched on for at least 24 months, Vanga and her younger brother Vasil were left in the guardianship of a kind neighbor.

Pando reunited with his children when he returned home in the fall of 1918 and remarried soon after, tying the knot with another local woman named “Tanka.” For a few months, it appeared as if the once-broken family had been patched up and granted a new lease on life. Pando dusted off his farming equipment and breathed new life into the family's previously neglected farmland. His bountiful harvests ensured that his wife and children went to bed every night with full stomachs, and even yielded him handsome profits.

Alas, the family's comfortable lifestyle was upended in the summer of the following year when Strumica was formally ceded to the Kingdom of Serbs,

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Croats, and Slovenes (later known as “Yugoslavia”). Under the new Yugoslav administration, Pando was once again apprehended and imprisoned for his ties to the pro-Bulgarian IMRO, and the entirety of his wealth, as well as the family's holdings were seized by the state. He was released sometime between late 1920 and early 1921, whereupon he secured a job as a shepherd. His piddling wages were nowhere near sufficient to support his family; as such, the family went on to grapple with extreme poverty for many years. During this time, Vanga also gained three half-siblings: two half-brothers, one of whom died in infancy and another named “Toma,” as well as a half-sister named “Lyubka.”

Vanga's relationship with her father and stepmother was strained, to say the least. Tanka was not a loving mother figure – at least not to her non-biological children – and instead, saw them (Vanga in particular) as little more than work mules. Still, even with her stepmother's lack of compassion, and her father's short temper and strict, domineering ways, as well as all the thankless labor she was made to perform daily, Vanga managed to find a way to preserve her youth.

Vanga had always been a clever and highly creative child. She learned to entertain herself as early as the age of three, during which the impressionable toddler made a game out of shadowing and imitating her neighbor as she made her rounds with the household chores. This was symbolic of the surrogate mother she would become, not only to the younglings in her family, but to millions of people of all ages and backgrounds around the globe. At around age six or seven, she began to amuse herself with strange games of her own creation. She often blindfolded herself with a strip of cloth – another telling portent of her fate – and groped around for knickknacks that she had previously concealed in various corners of the room. She also enjoyed playing doctor, oftentimes blindfolded too, “treating” her neighborhood friends and toys, and prescribing made-up herbal concoctions to her “patients.”

Disheartened by the stagnancy of their ill fortunes in Strumica, Pando and his brother Kostadin made the joint decision to uproot their families and relocate to their hometown of Novo Selo in 1923. They had not even finished unpacking when they were struck by yet another terrible blow of misfortune.

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12-year-old Vanga and her cousins were strolling home from a neighboring pasture one summer's day, where they had just grazed the family's donkeys, when the pulsing billow of clouds hovering above them began to swirl. The children yanked the donkeys' leads and accelerated their pace, attempting to outrun the whistling, spinning column of wind descending from the sinister greenish-gray skies, but it was too late. While the other children managed to duck into a nearby storm cellar in the nick of time, the whirling vortex raged forth, scooping up Vanga and dropping her on a field about half a mile away.

The hysterical children split up and scoured the overgrown field for their missing cousin for nearly an hour, to no avail. With Vanga nowhere to be found, they bolted home and alerted the adults. How long Vanga stayed missing remains a matter of debate. Some say she remained missing for several days, left to her own devices with no food, water, and shelter from the elements, which made her recovery that much more miraculous. Others say she was discovered just hours later.

Either way, when Vanga was found, her bruised skin was ice-cold, and her clothes torn and coated with dirt and debris. The poor girl, still whimpering and shaking like a leaf, mustered up the energy to point to her eyes, which were screwed shut, as they were gunked up with sand. The adults rinsed Vanga's eyes vigorously as soon as she was carried home, but the damage had been done; she was unable to open her eyes at all in the weeks that followed, due to the growing pain and the rapid advancement of infection. Her father pawned off some livestock and what little valuables he had at a great loss, and requested small loans from neighbors. Even so, he had only raised enough funds for a partial operation.

Vanga eventually regained the ability to open and shut her eyelids without discomfort, but her vision steadily worsened as time progressed. She became completely deprived of her eyesight four years later, her twinkling brown eyes permanently replaced by milky white pupils. She later lost the ability to open her eyelids again in her old age, which, due to her abundance of wrinkles, almost appeared to be completely sealed shut.

While most would argue that the tornado incident was a freak occurrence, Vanga herself was supposedly convinced that it was no accident. In fact, she believed that the tornado had been conjured up by a higher power specifically

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so that she would lose her vision, thus planting in her the seed of her powers and instilling her with a different kind of clarity.

As dictated by Bulgarian mythology, beautiful, yet unpredictable creatures known as the *samodivi* – magical nymphs who dwelt in faraway mountains, forests, springs, and waterfalls situated “on the edge of the world” – were drawn to sudden, violent upheavals in natural elements, namely hurricanes, maelstroms, and of course, tornadoes. These fickle fairies, who belonged to an exclusively female community, were known for their promiscuity, and their tendency to kidnap and fornicate with young men to appease their ungovernable libidos. They made no romantic commitments to any of the men they bedded, choosing to raise their daughters themselves.

Oftentimes, they sought to recruit female humans into their sisterhood, and did so via dreams, near-death experiences, and other scenarios wherein the lines between the material world and the afterlife, and the conscious and subconscious are blurred. Victims were usually going through important developmental stages in their lives, mainly the transition from motherhood to grandmotherhood – or in Vanga's case, girlhood to pubescence. Most who came into contact with the *samodivi* either died, or worse, lost their minds. Others, such as Vanga, who lived to tell the tale, were transformed into *znahar* , the Bulgarian word for an elderly female with supernatural healing powers, overnight. Only in the rarest of instances were these survivors gifted with the powers of clairvoyance. In this case, Vanga hit the jackpot.

In 1925, two years before the sibyl in-the-making lost what was left of her vision, 14-year-old Vanga was sent to the House of the Blind in the Serbian city of Zumun. Ironically, it was at this boarding school that she was given the best care of her life thus far. The attentive and well-trained staff clothed, groomed, fed, and nursed the special needs students, and taught them how to adapt to their disability with great patience. The pupils also received a basic, but diverse education, which included mathematics, vocabulary and grammar, and most importantly, Braille – a touch-based reading and writing system for the blind. Additionally, the students learned how to knit, perform standard household chores like cooking and cleaning, and play the piano, among other instruments; some even became rather adept at drawing and painting. Vanga was never particularly invested in her studies, only grasping

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the essentials of her Braille training, and was therefore described as only "semi-literate" in her adulthood.

Like most other teenage girls her age, Vanga met her first love at school. The object of her affection was another visually impaired pupil named Dimitar. A kind and gentle soul, Dimitar hailed from an affluent, locally prominent family that resided in the remote town of Gyoto. Dimitar's feelings for Vanga were so strong that he sought and secured his parents' blessings, and he proposed to his sweetheart in the spring of 1928. The likewise love-struck Vanga delightedly accepted his proposal. Eager to share the news with her family, she composed a letter with the aid of one of her teachers, in which she beseeched her father for his consent.

To Vanga's utter dismay, her father not only explicitly forbade her from marrying Dimitar, he demanded that she return to Novo Selo at once. Tanka had died during the delivery of Vanga's fourth half-sibling; the newborn, too, perished shortly after. As the eldest daughter, Vanga was duty-bound to look after her brothers and sisters – 14-year-old Vasil, four-year-old Toma, and two-year-old Lyubka – and to tend to the housework. The obedient Vanga did as she was told and became a stand-in mother to the children, with her siblings often addressing her as such. Babysitting and household management aside, Vanga knitted quilts, scarves, and other articles of clothing, which were sold to her neighbors in exchange for food and small amounts of cash.

Apparently, Vanga's unrelenting heartache, among other underlying factors, led to a drastic change in her personal tastes and character. By the following year, the 18-year-old had become disinterested in her appearance and fashion in general, and insistently wore tattered, old-fashioned hand-me-down gowns once belonging to elderly women, which were donated to local charities after their deaths. Her old soul was further reflected when she launched sewing and embroidery classes for young village girls, which was a craft typically reserved for middle-aged women. That being said, Vanga also exhibited signs of developmental regression, as she reportedly became more childlike in her speech and mannerisms.

In 1939, 28-year-old Vanga encountered another near-death experience when she contracted chronic pleurisy. The illness is defined by *Mayo Clinic* as "a condition in which the pleura – two large, thin layers of tissue that separate

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your lungs from your chest wall – becomes inflamed," its most notable symptom being persistent, excruciating, localized chest pains that are exacerbated by breathing. Her physician was pessimistic about Vanga's recovery, advising her parents to get her affairs in order in preparation for her impending death. Once again, Vanga subverted all expectations and soon bounced back with a clean bill of health.

It was then that Vanga's psychic powers began to manifest themselves in earnest. In most accounts, Vanga reportedly received her first otherworldly vision right after the tornado incident when she was awaiting rescue, wherein disembodied spirits informed her of her new gifts of healing and second sight, but she initially chalked it up to temporary delusional psychosis brought about by trauma, starvation, and dehydration. To put it another way, while the tornado had indeed awakened her third eye, it was the pleurisy that ultimately kicked her powers into high gear. Vanga later spoke about an unnamed ancient warrior spirit who visited her during her second tango with death; this was the guardian angel, Vanga claimed, who cleansed her of the disease.

She was suddenly inundated with invasive, eerily vivid dreams. She continued to be haunted by phantom voices when she was wide awake, which bled through the walls and emanated from plants and other inanimate objects. She also became involuntarily accustomed to ghostly apparitions that appeared before her, which were not presented as shadowy silhouettes, but detailed, clearly defined figures amidst the usual haze of fuzzy dark colors.

The most spectacular of the newfound powers, however, were her precognitive gifts. For the most part, Vanga's sibylline visions came without warning. These visions have been likened to short clips that played in her mind, showing flashes of major events in the future. Occasionally, one of her spectral associates clued her in with bits of information to add some context to the puzzling images, but she was mostly left to fill in the blanks herself. Furthermore, Vanga possessed the ability to "read" people and literally see what lay in store for them specifically. The entire life of the individual in question, starting from their day of birth to their final breaths on their deathbeds, rolled like a feature-length film in her mind's eye. When oracular spirits entered her body, she slipped into a trance. She claimed they spoke

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through her, as evidenced by the change in her vocal timbre, using her as a vehicle to disseminate warnings about future events and other arcane secrets.

At first, Vanga made the conscious decision to keep her dazzling, yet inconceivable gifts to herself, as the last thing she wanted was to be bussed off to the funny farm. It was only in the first weeks of the following year that she lowered her guard and shared her abilities with family members and close loved ones for the first time. It was a piecemeal process; she began by confiding in them about her ghostly visitors and the bodiless voices, before gradually easing them into her precognitive visions and healing touch. As one might have expected, her loved ones were initially more than skeptical about it all and showed concern for her mental health, but their disbelief swiftly faded when her alarmingly accurate predictions began to come to fruition. They tried to coax her into revealing her divine gifts before an audience, hoping to spread the news via word-of-mouth, and gushed about all the good that her powers would bring unto the world.

The fervent encouragement notwithstanding, Vanga remained ambivalent about exposing her secrets to the public and was particularly averse to the thought of the unwanted attention that was certain to come her way, among other repercussions. Her internal conflict was compounded by a disconcerting revelation she received in the early spring of 1940. By then, all of Europe was buzzing about the German occupation of Poland, which began on September 1, 1939, thereby leading Great Britain and France to wage war on the invading nation two days later.

At this point, most other European civilians, while unnerved by the turn of events, failed to grasp the gravity of the situation, perhaps in denial about the idea of reliving the nightmare of the Great War just two decades after the fact. Vanga appeared to have been one of the few who saw the writing on the wall: this invasion was the catalyst that triggered World War II, which would be considerably deadlier than the previous war. Her countrymen, according to Vanga's vision, were in imminent danger, as they were fated to enter the terrible global conflict in early 1941.

Vanga was even more reluctant to divulge this information, given the sheer audacity of making such a statement backed by zero proof. She also battled with self-doubt, questioning her own sanity and the reliability of her

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interpretative skills. In the end, however she felt about disclose her vision was irrelevant.

Vanga was attending a village gathering some weeks after the vision when she fell into another one of her trances. A few in the crowd rushed over to assist her, only to spring back with a startled shriek almost instantly. Legend has it that a blinding shaft of light radiated from the face of the fluttery-eyed woman. She then parted her trembling lips, and out poured the low, raspy voice of an older gentleman, who sounded the alarms about their forthcoming entry into the war and the unimaginable carnage that was to come. The blind woman's chilling ramblings spread through the village's grapevines like wildfire.

Lo and behold, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria officially retracted their positions of neutrality and entered the war in March 1941, allying themselves with the Axis powers. Those who had caught wind of Vanga's prophecy were absolutely floored, to say the least. Once again, Vanga became the talk of the town. Circulation of the sensational story – the blind seer and her breathtakingly precise prophecies – snowballed, traveling to a neighboring village, then the village next to that, and so on and so forth.

The Road to Prestige

Shortly after the German occupation, Vanga was forcibly separated from Toma and Lyubka, who were both summoned to the camp of a nearby partisan detachment – a covert armed force created for the sole purpose of attacking and repulsing the interloping soldiers. Toma, unfortunately, was ensnared and taken as hostage by Nazi soldiers in 1944, and he was mercilessly tortured and murdered by his captors. Lyubka, on the other hand, managed to flee from a camp, hitched a ride home, and tearfully reunited with her half-sister. From that point forward, Lyubka and Vanga became practically joined at the hip. Not only did Lyubka relieve her sister of some of the domestic responsibilities, she became Vanga's personal assistant, organizing and regulating appointments for the dizzying queue of pilgrims who showed up at their front door every day like clockwork.

Interestingly enough, in the early years of the clairvoyant's career, the authenticity of her inexplicable superhuman abilities was seldom disputed.

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As a matter of fact, almost all who were granted the privilege of Vanga's time were in agreement that her powers were very much real; who it was that bestowed these gifts upon her was the bone of contention. Some pegged Vanga as a vile occultist and disciple of the dark arts and theorized that her talents came from Satan himself. Others cursed the naysayers and adamantly defended Vanga, declaring the prophetess a divine doctor and a special messenger of God. In time, many of her early detractors switched to the latter camp, thanks to widespread testimonies regarding Vanga's purportedly untouchable track record. These accounts went hand-in-hand with the stories that told of the hope and resolution she brought to troubled pilgrims, as well as the peace of mind, and emotional and physical healing she granted to grieving and ailing souls.

By the end of 1941, Vanga had become the village's resident psychic and healer, and she was so greatly revered one would think she was an actual god living among men. Given the unconventionality and diversity of her vocation, so to speak, how people described her varied. Her disparagers called her a *vračkata* or *gadatelkata* , the equivalents of a hack crystal-gazer, while her supporters opted for *jasnovidka* , meaning “blessed clairvoyant.” Others simply called her a *narodni liječnik,* or “traditional folk doctor,” in English. In her prime, however, she became universally known as “Baba Vanga,” or “Grandma Vanga,” an affectionate nickname coined by her ardent following.

Visitors in the years that followed sought Vanga's counsel on an extensive range of problems. Some requested traditional fortune telling and dream-deciphering services and inquired about the outcomes of their love lives, important exams, careers, and other personal matters. Sometimes, Vanga exercised her psychic detection skills to locate stray livestock and misplaced valuables. Others brought critically ill spouses, children, relatives, and friends, and begged Vanga to expel the horrid diseases from their bodies.

The majority of Vanga's visitors throughout the 1940s tracked her down for a different and much more specific reason: to learn the fates of their loved ones at war. There were those who wanted a glimpse into their soldier's experiences and were anxious to know the date of his homecoming. Then, there were those whose soldiers had been declared MIA and were therefore aching to know if they were still alive. Some of those who met with bad news

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were given the consolation prize of closure - with the aid of her ghostly companions, Vanga directed surviving family members to their soldier's place of death so that they could arrange for the retrieval of and a proper burial for the body.

Visitors were instructed to tuck a few sugar cubes under their pillows on the eve of their appointments and to sleep on said pillows throughout the night. They were then expected to bring these sugar cubes to Vanga the next day. The sibyl took the cubes and gingerly shuffled them around in her cupped palm for the duration of the consultation. The seemingly common commodity, for unknown reasons, somehow activated Vanga's powers and forged a connection between the soothsayer and the subject. Naturally, the quirky ritual elicited chortles and scoffs, but the pilgrims humored Vanga all the same and promptly stopped laughing when they saw how effective it seemed to be.

The more cynical pilgrims who turned to Vanga out of desperation, and even some of those well-acquainted with the craft found the sessions unsettling. They were spooked and discomfited by Vanga's trances: the jerks and twitches, uncontrollable eye-swiveling, and wildly mismatching voices that rattled off the name of the missing soldier, along with the name and roster of the unit they belonged to, the events leading up to their disappearance or death, and the location of their remains – all in a single breath. Some left fuming, convinced it was all an act, and an excessively theatrical one at that, but again, all their doubts melted away when they eventually reconnected with their soldier, exactly as the soothsayer had foretold.

The following anecdote is said to have been the case that put Vanga on the map and popularized her as the patron diviner of lost soldiers. Sometime between the winter of 1941 and the early spring of 1942, Vanga was visited by the mother of a missing soldier named Christo Prchanov. To the mother's great delight, the seer told her that Sgt. Prchanov was safe and sound, but that he would not be back for some time. After the session, Christo's mother hastened home and spread the joyous news at once. The soldier's distraught loved ones breathed a collective sigh of relief – all but his new bride, Pavlina.

The young maiden, supposedly prostrate with grief, was already resigned to

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the fact that she was now a widow and refused to have her heart broken a second time by what she decided was false hope. Ignoring the Prchanovs' protests, Pavlina moved out of the family home, and was married to and shacking up with a new man within a month. Imagine the rude awakening Pavlina experienced when she ran into Christo at the market square a year later. Before Christo even opened his mouth to speak, Pavlina turned as white as a sheet and fainted, slumping into her new husband's arms. Worse yet, poor Christo's triumphant return was further marred when his mother died of a heart attack just days later. Some say that Vanga knew all along that the mother and son's reunion would be a fleeting one, and that she had intentionally kept this part of her vision to herself to spare the woman the heartache.

Vanga's miraculous healing touch was equally phenomenal. Just as she had done as a child, she administered remedies that revolved around herbs mainly native to Bulgaria. She hardly ever prescribed the same remedy twice, and as expected, some of the cures were highly peculiar, even to those familiar with folk healing. Once, the mystic instructed the family members of a woman suffering from an unspecified mental illness to pluck a few handfuls of the herbs that grew along the banks of a nearby river, and to steep these leaves in buckets of water (collected from the same river) overnight. Then, they were to dip the bucket in the brew and pour it over the sick woman's head repeatedly. And what do you know: whatever disorder she suffered from vanished in a wink – at least, according to Vanga's devotees.

Few if any of Vanga's recipes were meant to be ingested in tea-form or otherwise; in most cases, people were directed to soak a folded piece of cloth in the potion and press it against the source of the ailment.

Names on the visitor waiting list were increasing by the day. Many of these pilgrims journeyed far and wide, sometimes spending several days on the road, to see the blind sibyl. Now, as previously established, Vanga was functionally illiterate, and was only superficially acquainted with Serbian and Bulgarian Braille. Thus, it was Lyubka who captured and manually recorded Vanga's sessions and prophecies, and she also served as a translator for those unversed in the Macedonian dialect. Obviously, when Vanga's celebrity reached a new high, relatives and neighbors began to pitch in.

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Vanga never openly asked for any form of financial compensation from the pilgrims, whether they were rich or poor, especially as most of those who sought her assistance had not a single penny to give. At the same time, she had no qualms about accepting monetary donations or presents. With their father gone, this was the sisters' only source of income. A lot of the time, pilgrims who had no cash to part with gifted Vanga a sack of freshly picked fruits or vegetables, a tub of lard or butter, and so on as a token of their appreciation. All that said, those who came empty-handed had no need to fret, for she was not one to grant anyone special treatment.

Not long after the meeting with Sgt. Prchanov's mother, Vanga and Lyubka moved 18 miles east to Petrich, a vibrant Bulgarian town nestled at the foot of the Belasica Mountains. The sisters selected a cheap, somewhat dilapidated one-story cottage in the countryside, just large enough for a little bedroom, a small kitchen, and a dining table, where Vanga could conduct her sessions. Her faithful adherents dutifully followed suit.

Vasil Mitov’s picture of Baba Vanga’s house in Petrich

It was at this new residence that Vanga received her most distinguished guest yet. On the morning of April 8, 1942, a conspicuously stately motorcade rolled up to the front of the cottage. Out stepped a slim, balding gentleman in a fittingly regal suit by the name of Boris Stanislaus Xaver, also known as Tsar Boris III of Bulgaria, the eldest son of Ferdinand I. Lyubka

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claimed that Vanga was not intimidated by the tsar's presence in the slightest, and flouting traditional etiquette, began to speak before he could even utter hello.

Boris III

Needless to say, the subject of the unlikely pair's dialogue fell victim to speculation as soon as news of their meeting leaked to the public, which only intensified when Boris staunchly refused to shed any light on the matter. Fortunately for the nosy, Lyubka spilled the beans years later. The tsar was reportedly keen to find out what major events he could expect during his tenure, and what the future of his beloved kingdom held. Vanga, who never sugarcoated her prophecies, informed him that the kingdom would succeed in expanding its dominion and establish itself as a formidable force. Bearing that in mind, the glory would be short-lived. Vanga's predictions regarding

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the tsar's tenure were far more open to interpretation.

"August 28th," Vanga muttered. "Get ready for her. She will be coming soon."

Vanga did not elaborate on the date's significance, nor did she provide any clues as to who "she" might be. When it became clear that the sibyl had nothing more to say to him, Boris acquiesced. The tsar left the premises feeling stunned, perplexed, intrigued, and yet somewhat relieved at having been given a peek at what was to come. On August 28th of the following year, Boris suffered a fatal heart attack shortly after his return from East Prussia, where he had met with Hitler. He was just 49.

Vanga met Boris about two months after she celebrated her 31st birthday. It was fair to say that her love life was nonexistent, as she had not been in a relationship in close to 15 years. Her family and friends concluded that she would spend the rest of her life as a spinster, for marriage at her age was almost unheard of; keep in mind this was a place and time where teen brides were the norm. On top of Vanga's disability and seeming lack of interest in the dating game, she was not conventionally attractive. Her 5'3", 125-pound frame appeared even more petite with her crooked posture, and though she had lovely hair (which had turned darker with age) and a kind face, her features were quite plain.

At the end of the day, Vanga seemed unbothered by her family's assumptions, perhaps, in hindsight, because she knew they would soon be proven wrong. They say that the only way for one to meet their better half is to put themselves out there, but in Vanga's case, it was her soulmate who found her instead. The second and last love of her life was a gentleman named Dimitar, surnamed Gushterov, who was raised in the village of Krandzhilitsa, located about 23 miles northwest, before moving to Petrich. He was an attractive 23-year-old Bulgarian soldier, with a full head of dark auburn hair, which he wore slicked to one side. He also had a slender nose and large, lustrous brown eyes.

Less than a week after Boris III's visit, Gushterov set off for his appointment with Vanga, and he spent the whole way there silently seething, his heart laden with sorrow, poisonous hatred, and fiery rage.

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Just as he turned into the mystic's courtyard, the front door of the cottage swung open. Vanga pottered down the path with a hint of a knowing smile on her lips, and hearing the approaching footsteps, beckoned the young soldier over. Never one for greetings and time-wasting pleasantries, she got straight to the point. “I know why you've come to me,” she said.

Gushterov was rendered speechless, as he had never met this woman before, and he had every reason to be. While Vanga was briefed on her schedule for the day every morning, she knew nothing about the pilgrims until they were acquainted face to face, and yet, she seemed to know precisely who he was. “You wish for me to hand you the names of your brother's killers,” Vanga continued. “I know your heart longs to seek revenge, for they have not only robbed you of a brother, they have left your nieces and nephews fatherless, and your sister-in-law, who is ill with tuberculosis, without a husband. But you must fight this urge. I will gladly name these wicked men, but you must give me your word that you will not inflict harm upon them. It is not your place. God will punish them in due time, and you will be witness to this.”

The soldier was both frustrated by the stipulation and awestruck by the brilliance of her clairvoyance, but more than anything, he could not peel his eyes off of Vanga. He was captivated by the tenderness of her voice, the softness of her movements, and the aura of purity, profound wisdom, and sincerity that exuded from her. It was, as Vanga's niece (and biographer) described it, “love at first sight.”

The age difference – Gushterov was eight years her junior – was hardly an issue. What actually mattered was the fact that he had a wife waiting for him back home. Nevertheless, the smitten soldier unceremoniously left his wife and continuously visited Vanga in the evenings after her last appointments over the next few days, courting her with flowers and meaningful conversations about life that lasted into the wee hours of the night.

Vanga and Lyubka moved into the Gushterovs' already cramped residence on April 22, which was also home to his ailing mother Magdalena, his widowed sister-in-law and her three children, as well as two other children fathered by his other two brothers. The lovebirds were betrothed within a week, and formally exchanged their vows on May 10.

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Although it was not anyone’s business, many were curious about whether or not Vanga and Gushterov were regularly intimate with one another, if ever. In an interview conducted decades later, one of Vanga's longtime friends maintained that the mystic had in fact consummated her marriage, as per her “marital duty, but only once, immediately after the wedding.” Most of her devotees chose to believe this, most likely to preserve their image of her as an uncorrupted and saintly, and hence asexual being. Whatever the case, the truth eventually died with the husband and wife, as it should. Vanga was reasonably offended when she learned of these prying speculations. “How dare they?” Vanga would grumble. “Who do they think I am? Why do they want to know what I do in my own bed with my husband?”

Vanga was famously childless. She later claimed that it was the blindness she was inflicted with and the subsequent powers she received that made her barren. Others believe her sterility stemmed from the malnourishment, hypothermia, and host of other illnesses that she, like many other women, suffered during the war. Vanga's infertility came as a crushing blow, as the woman who was made to mother her siblings for years could not produce any children of her own.

Thankfully, she was able to fill the void in her life by adopting two children: a boy, Dimitar Volchev, named after his father, and a girl named Violetta. Volchev, orphaned just a few months after his birth, was believed to be terminally ill and on the verge of death when he was delivered to Vanga. The mystic cured him and nursed him until he grew to a healthy weight, and in doing so, formed a deep, heartfelt bond with the newborn. She and her husband decided to keep him, and baptized him soon thereafter. Violetta, in contrast, was already six when she became a part of the family. Likewise, Vanga fell in love with the sweet, well-mannered girl straight away, and upon learning about the loss of her parents, she persuaded Gushterov into taking the child under their wing.

Vanga's love for her children was thoroughly requited. As adults, Volchev and Violetta fondly recalled how their loving mother rocked them to sleep in her arms while singing them lullabies every night. She doted over her children and rarely ever lost her temper, but at the same time, enforced rules and disciplined the kids whenever necessary.

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Above all else, she was honest, fair, and always motivated them to pursue their callings. Rather than spoil herself with the donations she amassed over the years, she invested in her children's education. Volchev, unlike his mother, was a studious student, and developed an interest in victimology and criminal justice in his teenage years. Following his high school graduation, he attended law school, aced his exams, and became a criminal prosecutor in Petrich. Volchev also supposedly married the same woman that his mother had seen in one of her visions several years before. Violetta's future was every bit as bright as her brother's. She, too, chased after a higher education; after completing university with honors and a degree in linguistics, Violetta entered the workforce and soon became a respected, well-traveled translator.

Vanga's own children aside, she was bombarded with godmother proposals from pilgrims all over the world – a privilege she never denied; the mystic had over 15,000 godchildren by the end of her life.

Gushterov was originally opposed to the idea of Vanga carrying on with her work and suggested that she confine herself to household chores like other wives. Some say he feared for Vanga's safety, as the Axis soldiers stationed there were becoming increasingly distrustful of the oracle and her skyrocketing stardom, with some floating the idea that she was a spy for rival forces. A pair of paramilitary officers named Boris Lazarov and Dimitar Chuchurov seemed to be particularly fixated with Vanga, and frequently dropped in unannounced to interrogate her about her activities; should she refuse to cooperate, the officers warned, they would not hesitate to throw her into a concentration camp. Vanga was in no way daunted by the officers' aggressive tactics, and answered whatever questions they had, for she had nothing to hide.

Gushterov eventually stepped aside so that his wife could proceed with her work unimpeded. After all, he was not permanently employed, and the donations Vanga received was their only somewhat stable source of income.

According to one account, when the Nazis finally dispelled their suspicions about the mystic, Hitler personally approached Vanga in early 1943 and offered her a job. The usually unflappable Vanga was visibly disturbed by the despicable despot's presence and vehemently spurned his offer. As the disgruntled warlord rose from his chair and turned to leave, the mystic

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imparted one final message. “Leave Russia (the Soviet Union) alone,” said Vanga. “You will lose this war.”

Vanga's marks undoubtedly infuriated the Fuhrer, who dismissed her as a deranged fraud, but her prophecy proved to be true. To punish Vanga for her insubordination, Hitler arranged for Gushterov to be conscripted and had him shipped off to Greece. The mystic was naturally saddened by her husband's departure, but knowing that his safe homecoming was written in the stars, Vanga urged him to keep calm and stay strong. “You will come home to me soon enough in one piece,” she said. “But watch out for the water!” Sure enough, Gushterov caught some form of hepatitis about a year into his deployment, most likely caused by the ingestion of contaminated water.

To Vanga's consternation, while Gushterov survived the war just as she had foreseen, he returned home a different, irreparably broken man afflicted with indelible mental and physical scars. He contracted another serious illness in 1947, and soon after became a chronic alcoholic, his poisons of preference being vodka and brandy. Gushterov's drinking problem drove a wedge between the spouses. Time and time again, Vanga argued with her husband about his irritability and aloofness, and pleaded with him to put down the bottle, as this, she said, would be the cause of his death.

This was where Vanga's powers showed its limitations. She may have possessed the gift of second sight, but she could not cure those who did not wish to be cured, nor could she make anyone bend to her will. Gushterov clung to his booze and was ultimately hospitalized for cirrhosis of the liver, along with dropsy – products of his alcohol abuse. Vanga had her husband discharged the day before his death so that he could spend his final hours in the comfort of their home.

Gushterov died with Vanga snuggled up against him on the early morning of April 1, 1962. As the story goes, Vanga promptly fell asleep the second he passed on, and remained trapped in unwakeable slumber until the day of his funeral. When Vanga finally stirred, much to Lyubka's relief, she took her sister's hand and said, “I accompanied his soul to the place where he belongs. He is at peace.”

Months later, Vanga and Lyubka moved to Rupite – a rustic, picturesque

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hamlet about seven miles northeast of Petrich that sat on the nether side of an extinct volcano known to the locals as “Mount Kozhukh.” It was apparently Vanga who chose the destination, for she believed that the mountainous area, replete with restorative sulfurous hot springs and medicinal herbs, would strengthen her powers. She moved into a small cabin located on the village's fringes and set up shop there, and once again, the pilgrims followed.

In a twist that few saw coming, the Bulgarian government officially employed Vanga as a civil servant in 1967. The authorities supplied her with a fully furnished office in the Institute of Suggestology and Parapsychology in Sofia, the state capital. They also provided for her a full-time team consisting of two secretaries tasked with transcribing sessions and documenting predictions, as well as several aides who vetted the applications of prospective visitors, scheduled appointments, and filed paperwork. Lyubka was also offered a job as a technical assistant, a salaried post which she accepted.

The state unquestionably played an instrumental role in boosting Vanga's fame and credibility, immortalizing her as a national treasure. That being said, the state's motives were not completely selfless, if at all. Certainly, the resources now at her disposal, along with her new monthly salary, alleviated many of her burdens and allowed her to work more efficiently. The state, however, now had unfettered access to precious intel – namely, a list of all the pilgrims who came to visit her and the transcripts of their meetings, including those with foreign leaders and dignitaries. Experts from the institute, as well as from the branch in Petrich were also commissioned to research the legitimacy and science behind Vanga's clairvoyance and healing powers.

Celebrated neurologist and psychiatrist Dr. Georgi Lozanov, who was also the creator of suggestology, and the founder and chairman of the institute, spearheaded the study. Lozanov recounted his first encounter with Vanga in an interview with Zlatka Dumeva of the *Lozanov International Trainers Association* in 2007. Lozanov noted, “[Before hiring Vanga], I decided to make sure that Vanga was really a fortune teller. So one day, my friend Shasho, his wife, and I drove to [see her]...She first told Sasho's fortune. She said, 'Oh, you are unfortunate. But don't give up. Your mother has been in a

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psychiatric center all of her life.' That was true. His mother [who suffered from schizophrenia] was in the Psychiatry Hospital in Karlukovo. After Sasho's turn, Vanga prophesied to his wife, E. Vanga told her: 'E, for 10 years you haven't been able to have children, but you will have one next year.' And indeed, a year later, she gave birth to a girl. My turn came. 'Georgi...you are going to make a study of me, aren't you?' She worded it very precisely. 'Yes, I am going to make a study of you, Vanga,' [I said]. And she replied, 'Remember that you have promised me that…Some years before that, I had searched for and examined 49 fortune tellers all over Bulgaria...and I had cycled all the country in order to investigate those fortune tellers...but [none were] as good as Vanga."

Academics outside of these institutes also conducted independent studies of her abilities, among them a psychiatrist and accomplished author named Nicola Shipkovensky, a member of both the International Council on Group Psychotherapy and the French Society for Psychosomatic Medicine and the World Federation of Neurology. It was Shipkovensky who introduced psychopathology to Bulgaria and shaped the country's understanding of modern judicial psychiatry. Another was Dr. Yuriy Negribetzkiy, a member of the International Academy of Science who specialized in energetic and informational science. It was he who attempted to scientifically explain how Vanga's unique brain worked in tandem with her psychic abilities by comparing her it to a computer system equipped with a sonar device.

Now that Vanga was an employee of the state, several changes were made in the terms of service. Apart from the fixed stipend of 200 leva (approximately $350 USD today) awarded to Vanga every month, sessions with the clairvoyant were no longer free. Local pilgrims were charged 10 leva ($17 USD) each, and non-locals were billed 50 leva ($87 USD). Profits were split in three ways: one part was used to fund the salaries of Vanga and her staff, another part was for overhead costs; and what remained went directly into the city treasury.

Vanga's wages might seem like a paltry sum, but one must not forget all the cash offerings she received from grateful pilgrims over the years. Some biographers estimate that the mystic may have received close to $100 million throughout her career from Bulgarian pilgrims alone. Those who met her,

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however, would never have guessed it, because despite her untold millions and international renown, Vanga's humility remained unaltered, and she continued to live modestly for the rest of her life.

A Fount of Prophecies

At this stage of Vanga's career, scoring an appointment with the popular seer on short notice was next to impossible. Most pilgrims were made to wait for a year minimum for a meeting. High-ranking politicians and celebrities were the only ones allowed to cut ahead in line, and even then, they were still made to wait a few days. At her most active, Vanga supposedly performed up to 130 readings a day, and due to the lofty demand, none of the sessions could exceed 10 minutes. Extensions were exclusively granted to esteemed figures. Given the enormity and strenuousness of her workload, Vanga only slept for an average of four or five hours a day, but her hard work paid off. The mystic's fans claim that Vanga was presented with over two tons of sugar over the course of her career, which suggests that she serviced upwards of a million pilgrims.

Vanga and Lyubka returned to Rupite in 1971 and purchased another charming cottage with a rusty-red wooden exterior and a cross-gabled roof covered with slate-gray tiles. The cottage stood in the heart of a wild orchard flanked by a bubbling hot spring just a few paces to her left, and to her right, a chapel dedicated to St. Petka-Paraskiva, along with a “magical” freshwater spring. The residence was further brightened by a sylvan yard and a ravishing garden, which housed a constellation of fragrant flowers and herbs in every shade of the rainbow. The purpose of this garden, which the sisters tended to religiously, was two-fold. Not only did Vanga find pleasure in the sweet perfume of her petunias, particularly because of her heightened sense of smell, she believed that the aromatic scents reinforced the bridge between her and the spirits. It was here that Vanga spent the remainder of her life and career.

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Anton Lefterov’s picture of Baba Vanga’s last house

The cottage interior embodied the mystic's simple tastes. The pristine floors were always freshly scrubbed, and all wooden tables, panels, and surfaces polished and spotless. There was very little clutter; in fact, all rooms were fitted with only the most basic furniture, and minimally decorated with rugs in muted colors, a few photographs and figurines, and some religious paraphernalia. Pilgrims were only allowed in the parlor next to the entrance. Relatives, close friends, and special guests were the only ones permitted to explore other parts of the house.

The predominantly colorless and outdated décor extended to and was most pronounced in Vanga's bedroom, as per her request. The walls, ceilings, curtains, and pattern-less sheets and pillows were eggshell-white. The old-fashioned rotary phone and alarm clock on top of her wooden nightstand, also dressed in a lacy white cloth, as well as the framed painting of St. Petka provided some contrast to the whiteness of the room. Moreover, a small puppet collection, which she began in her late 30s, sat in one corner. Vanga, who now covered her thinning, graying curls with a headscarf, adored her

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puppet pals, and was often seen talking to them and stroking their hair, enjoying their company well into her golden years.

It was in this very cottage that Vanga, now an established icon, hosted many of her most prestigious guests. The mystic commanded such respect that upon entering the abode, guests, regardless of their social standing, all took their hats in their hands and bowed before her.

Some of the most frequent visitors were Bulgarian artist Svetlin Roussev, whose unique, stylized paintings and frescoes adorned the walls of the nearby chapel, and gymnastic coach Neshka Robeva. Other familiar faces included the tyrant Todor Zhivkov, who reigned over Bulgaria as General Secretary of the Communist Party for three-and-a-half decades, and Simeon II, the son of Tsar Boris III and the 48 th prime minister of Bulgaria, who consulted the clairvoyant on more than one occasion. Zhivkov's daughter Lyudmila, a member of the BCP and Politburo who was widely known for her fanatical interest in esoteric religions and the occult, was one of Vanga's most avid devotees.

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Zhivkov

Lyudmila's regular divination sessions with Vanga, which were kept under wraps, took place in her Sofia estate. It appeared that Lyudmila believed she, too, possessed supernatural powers, which could only be kindled in Vanga's presence. She shared her magnificent experiences with her closest confidantes, always with great enthusiasm, telling them of all the amazing characters that swung by during their seances, such as Alexander the Great. Even more impressive, Lyudmila claimed that their collective energies, when channeled in the same room, were at times so potent that her body would defy gravity and levitate several inches off the ground.

Other notable figures who made the oftentimes arduous journey to Vanga's home included Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, as well as a multi-millionaire business magnate and future president of the Republic of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov. According to the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, “Vanga is exceptionally popular and beloved in Russia, and for the Russians her name and everything related to her has special magnetism.”

Many of the seer's guests left with an unforgettable story. Leonid Leonov, a multiple award-winning novelist and playwright from Moscow, visited Vanga, and during his visit, Vanga advised him to reconsider the placement of his manuscripts, which were at the time stowed away in his dacha, which he used as a holiday home. Leonov could not help but raise an eyebrow at the tip, as he had never before experienced any issues with his storage methods, but he packed them up and moved them to his apartment. A raging fire erupted at his dacha just days later, and everything inside of it was reduced to ashes.

The prophecy told to Sergey Medvedev, who served as press secretary to Russian president Boris Yeltsin and visited Vanga on his boss' behalf, was bittersweet. On the one hand, the mystic reportedly predicted that Yeltsin would emerge victorious in the second presidential election in 1996, albeit by a slim margin. On the other, she asserted that Yeltsin's weak heart was getting worse, and she urged that he take better care of himself. Yeltsin secured a second term in 1996, just as Vanga had forecasted. He suffered a fatal cardiac arrest 11 years later.

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Not all of these sessions, of course, were quite so eventful, but they were memorable all the same. The meeting between Vanga and Sergey Mikhalkov, who penned the lyrics for the Soviet Union's anthem, was by all accounts a pleasant one. Vanga predicted that he would live a long and fruitful life, which he did, dying at the age of 96. They also reminisced about his younger sister, who tragically died at the age of five, which deeply moved him, for she had been reduced to a faint whisper in his memory until Vanga made mention of her.

None of these sessions, however, would compare to Vanga's brief, but momentous encounter with singer-songwriter, silver screen starlet, and style icon Silvana Armenulić, otherwise known as the "Queen of Sevdalinka" and the "Marilyn Monroe of Yugoslavia." Armenulić, an intensely spiritual individual, supposedly developed an obsession with her mortality in her mid-30s and spent a fortune on readings from astrologers, mediums, palmists, and telepaths. "I am a great pessimist," Armenulić admitted. "I am afraid of life, the future, what tomorrow will be. I am afraid whether it will be at all...Maybe I got that fear of the future in the taverns where I used to sing, because when the music goes out, when the glasses stop ringing, and the guests go home, to their happiness, I am left alone wondering if there is a tomorrow for me."

As it turned out, Armenulić's worst fear would soon be realized. When Armenulić's cross-continent tour took her to Bulgaria on the first week of August in 1976, her handlers jumped through a number of hoops to secure an appointment with Vanga at the last minute. To Armenulić's horror, the meeting, which only lasted a few minutes, seemed to drag on forever, and it was as awkward as it was acutely distressing. The 65-year-old mystic deliberately declined to acknowledge the star's presence and insisted upon staring blankly out the window with her back turned to her throughout the duration of the session. The normally charismatic Armunelic made repeated attempts to engage her in conversation, to no avail. Flustered, the guest picked up her purse and turned to leave, and it was only then that Vanga chose to break her silence. "Nothing," Vanga mumbled. "You do not have to pay. I do not want to speak with you. Not now. Go and come back in three months."

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Although she was unnerved by the mystic's unprovoked behavior, Armunelic politely thanked her for her time and did as she was instructed. Just as she was about to make her exit, Vanga called out to her a second time. “Wait,” Vanga mused, her tone suddenly softening. “Actually, it appears that you will not be returning. Go, go. If you can come back in three months, do so.”

Armenulić's heart sunk to her stomach and from her mouth came a strangled gasp. Her entourage, who waited for her outside, later recalled how the poor woman burst out of Vanga's cottage with bloodshot eyes and tears streaming down her cheeks. August and September came and went, but on the evening of October 10, a Ford Granada, traveling from Aleksandrovac to Belgrade, abruptly swerved into the wrong lane on the Belgrade-Nis highway and crashed into a military truck manned by Rastko Grujic. All three passengers in the Ford Granada – 37-year-old Armenulić, her pregnant 25-year-old sister Mirsada, and orchestra conductor Miodrag Jasarevic – were killed.

As dazzling as her alleged encounters with the aforementioned figures were, it was Vanga's widely publicized prophecies regarding large-scale, consequential future events that cemented her fame. The predictions supposedly made by Vanga throughout her career were chronicled by Lybuka and her other assistants, then blazoned abroad by her faithful followers and other third party sources. Therefore, it is impossible to know with absolute certainty whether Vanga herself actually made these predictions. It is always possible that those tasked with documenting her prophecies misinterpreted her words, considering her limited vocabulary, famously childlike speech patterns, and the often ambiguous nature of her messages. One must also take into account the legions of fictitious “click-bait” stories and fake news that have cropped up online in recent years.

This discouraging trend is not limited to the 21 st century. Unscrupulous reporters from seedy publications have been fabricating and distorting stories since the advent of newspapers. Anatoly Stroyev, who was employed as the Bulgarian correspondent for the Russian tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda* between 1985 and 1989, confessed that many of the “sensations” that the were published about the blind mystic were “invented...[by] journalists for

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the sake of circulation."

To begin with, in the early months of 1963, Vanga declared that the 35th president of the United States would be the victim of an assassination. Her prophecy came to fruition on November 22 that year when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated while riding in a motorcade in Dallas.

Sometime between late 1963 and early 1964, Vanga revealed her three predictions for 1968: the assassination of 42-year-old US Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the electoral victory of Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon, and the mass protests and ensuing violent upheaval in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic now remembered as the "Prague Spring."

In July of the following year, Vanga received another alarming premonition, in which she "witnessed" the tragic fate of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. "Her dress will destroy her!" said Vanga to her assistants. "I see an orange-yellow dress in smoke and fire!" The prophecy came to pass 15 years later. On the morning of October 31, 1984, Gandhi was murdered by her traitorous bodyguards Beant and Satwant Singh in New Delhi. The prime minister was clad in a marigold-colored cotton sari.

10 years later, in 1979, Vanga predicted what resembled the *Perestroika* , an era of reformation and "restructuring" within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, as well as the disintegration and death of the USSR. Not long after, she reportedly warned her followers about a ghastly nuclear accident that would transpire within the next two decades, which her adherents believed was a reference to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster near the city of Pripyat in Soviet Ukraine. She also predicted that "Kursk" would be "covered in water" at the dawn of the 21st century, and that "the whole world [would] weep over it." Her followers, at the time, concluded that the Kursk she spoke of was the city in western Russia of the same name, and they assumed that the mystic was alluding to some kind of cataclysmic super-typhoon. The misjudgment only came to light on August 12, 2000, when the *Kursk* , a nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine dispatched by the Russian Navy, was rocked by two titanic explosions caused by a failed discharge. The blasts tore apart the hull, which led to its sinking and the untimely deaths of 118 crew members on board.

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In 1989, Vanga received what was arguably the second most renowned premonition of her career, which made its rounds on newspaper headlines around the world in the early 2000s and sparked a resurgence in her popularity. “Horror, horror!” the mystic reportedly exclaimed. “The American brothers will fall after being attacked by steel birds. The wolves will be howling in a bush, and innocent blood will be gushing.” Vanga's followers are now convinced that she was attempting to tip them off to terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, which claimed nearly 3,000 lives.

Vanga's lesser-known prophecies, if true, are just as mind-boggling. Roughly a year or two before she supposedly predicted 9/11, she announced that “a huge wave” was due to strike “a big coast covered with people and towns” sometime in the first years of the new century, and that “everything will disappear beneath the water and melt, just like ice.” It is said that this prophecy was a warning about the horrific 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami, the deadliest tsunami in history, which killed an estimated 230,000 people.

The sibyl also made numerous predictions about American presidents in recent history, as well as the circumstances surrounding their administrations. For one, she supposedly foretold that the nation's 44 th president would be African-American, and that he would be the last commander-in-chief of the United States. Vanga also allegedly foresaw the “messianic personality” of the 45 th president, who she claimed would be confronted by a crisis that woul ultimately “bring the country down.” This, many now believe, was a reference to Donald Trump and the COVID pandemic.

Of course, those who seek to seriously contemplate the credibility of Vanga's prophetic visions must contend with her equally lengthy list of unfulfilled prophecies. For example, in early 1994, she predicted that both finalists for that year's FIFA World Cup would come from countries “beginning with the letter 'B'.” Just as she foretold, Brazil nabbed a place in the finals, but they were pitted against Italy, whose victory in the semifinals booted Bulgaria out of the running.

Later that year, Vanga declared that cancer would be eradicated in the early 21 st century, and that the cure-all would be rich in iron. Mankind would then simultaneously release a miraculous drug that would reverse the aging process, and that it would feature hormones from dogs, horses, and turtles.

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According to Vanga, “The horse is strong, the dog is hardy, and the turtle lives for hundreds of years.”

Vanga's predictions for World War III seem to be yet another bungled prophecy. She claimed it would begin in the autumn of 2010 and stretch on for the next four years. Nuclear weapons, the mystic maintained, would give rise to a “radioactive fallout” that would annihilate “all animals and vegetation in the northern hemisphere.” Similarly, the simultaneous chemical warfare would lead to a devastating outbreak of ulcers, skin cancer, and irreversible respiratory issues. Vanga claimed that by 2016, all of Europe would be reduced to a bleak, dystopian wasteland and “cease to exist.” Fortunately, Europe remains wholly intact, but some of Vanga's followers insist that this was merely a metaphor for Brexit.

There are also countless testimonies provided by pilgrims who claim they received false predictions from Vanga. Russian illusionist and hypnotist Yuri Gorny, in an interview with *Science and Life* magazine in 2004, described the grave disappointment of his friend Aleksandr Bovin (a reputable journalist, diplomat, and Russian ambassador to Israel) after he visited Vanga in the 1990s. Gorny said, “[She] absolutely did not guess anything in his past, or in the present, or, as it soon turned out, in the near future.”

Pilgrims have also come forward to contest Vanga's reputation as a sweet, soft-spoken, and selfless woman who was beloved by all. Some say that this was a complete and utter lie, and that she was a testy, disagreeable grouch, at least in her advanced age. “Local people don't believe in her,” an unnamed Rupite resident told *The New York Times* . “She just looks at you, asks you what's wrong, and then repeats phrases she has memorized. A lot of what she does is for money. And the way she talks is vulgar. She uses words that no woman should use, especially not a godly person.”

Vanga's critics have openly speculated about the motivations and conditions behind what they believe to be her sham career. Some theorized that Vanga's deception was unintentional, and that she was simply a mentally ill woman who inadvertently ended up in the spotlight. Others are more jaded, insisting she was an extremely business savvy con artist who manipulated millions of gullible people. Some in this camp assert that Vanga partnered with corrupt government officials and local businesses, and that it

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was all a complex conspiracy to boost Bulgarian tourism.

Evgeny Aleksandrov, chairman of the Commission for Combating Pseudoscience and Falsification of Scientific Research, broke down the theory: “Vanga is a well-promoted state business, thanks to which the provincial region has become a place of pilgrimage for crowds from all over the world...Taxi drivers, waiters in cafes, [and] hotel staff are people who, thanks to the 'clairvoyant,' had excellent, stable earnings. All of them willingly collected preliminary information for Vanga: where the person came from, why, what he hopes for. And Vanga then laid out this information to clients as if she saw them herself. They helped with the dossier on clients and special services, under whose cover the state brand worked.”

Regardless of whether Vanga was a fraud, she was committed to her calling, and she continued to host sessions until the day of her death. In fact, Vanga's supporters claim that the clairvoyant predicted the dates of her death and burial, August 11 and August 13, and that her powers would be transferred to a blind 10-year-old French girl now believed to be Kaede Uber of Montpolier. Other accounts have contradicted this claim. Vanga was diagnosed with breast cancer in the early months of 1996, and she rejected the doctor's recommendations for an operation, for she believed that she would live to see another three years. Instead, the cancer metastasized, and Vanga passed away on August 11 of that year. Many experts believed that her life could have been prolonged if she had agreed to the operation. Vanga's relatives later revealed the mystic's final words: “Don't hate each other, for you are all my children.”

Baba Vanga was laid to rest near her Rupite home in a beautiful stone grave surmounted by a tombstone fashioned in the shape of a stylized Greek cross and a bed of flowers. The mystic's Petrich home was converted into the Baba Vanga Museum, which opened its doors in May 2008. A handsome 881-pound stone sculpture, which depicted the blind sibyl seated upon a bench, was unveiled in Rupite three years later.

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Todor Bozhinov’s picture of the church where Baba Vanga is buried

Despite being dead for over 20 years, people continue to hotly debate the meanings of Baba Vanga’s prophecies, and some of them continue to reach into the future. For the year 2021, Vanga foresaw a string of “cataclysms and great disasters,” the merging of “three giants,” and the emergence of a “strong dragon” that will “seize humanity” in its scaly fists.

Furthermore, according to a premonition Vanga received in 1979, Russia will become an unconquerable force within the next five years. “All will thaw, as if ice,” said Vanga. “– [and] only one [will] remain untouched: Vladimir's glory, [the] glory of Russia...Nobody can stop her. All will be removed by her from the way...[and Putin will] also become the lord of the world.” In 1993, Vanga also predicted that the USSR, which collapsed two years prior, would rise again in the first quarter of the 21 st century.

Vanga prophesied that by 2028, people will have put an end to world hunger and will also have landed on the planet Venus, a venture prompted by humanity's quest for new sources of energy. These milestones, however, will

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soon be forgotten, as they will be overshadowed by a far more urgent crisis: the melting of virtually all the polar ice caps around the world, leading to a disastrous rise in ocean levels, which will begin en masse in 2033. At the same time, “Islam” will begin its “invasion” of the entire European continent, and by 2043, Rome will have become the official headquarters of the “caliphate.”

Vanga claimed that by 2046, scientists will have perfected cloning, among other scientific and technological achievements, and that will be the year scientists debut state-of-the-art cloning technology that produces duplicates of bodily organs, thereby allowing physicians to cure any disease imaginable.

20 years later, the United States will launch an attack on Islamic Rome with an “instant freezing” missile. The world will then experience a period of Utopian existence with the gradual rise of a class-free socialist society and the rejuvenation of many once-lost natural resources between the years of 2072 and 2086. By 2130, the world will have made contact with extraterrestrial life forms and will learn to coexist with the aliens. People will also learn how to create fully functional and habitable cities underwater using knowledge imparted to them by aliens. In 2164, scientists will introduce the world to history's first animal-human hybrid.

Between 2170 and 2256, a colony on Mars will officially unveil nuclear weapons and clamor for complete self-autonomy from Earth, perhaps leading to the first instance of space warfare. Humans will also make a “terrible discovery” as they advance their research on and interaction with extraterrestrial life forms, and a flag will be raised in the first human colony on Venus. Perhaps most exciting of all, people will have figured out the science of time travel at some point between 2262 and 2304.

The year 2341 will mark the beginning of the end. The world will be ravaged by an unremitting chain of man-made and natural disasters. With Earth now unfit for human life, people will find a way to relocate to an entirely different solar system, but this race to a more promising planet light years away will engender terrible wars and seas of bloodshed, and in the end, only thousands will make the escape. By 3797, every last animal and plant on the planet will have been rendered extinct, and all of Earth's natural resources will be utterly exhausted. At this stage, the bulk of what's left of humanity

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would have relocated to neighboring planets to start anew. The remaining humans on Earth are doomed to live “like beasts” between the years 3815 to 3878, during which bedlam and moral depravity will prevail until a “new religion” surfaces to “lead [them] out of the darkness.”

By 4674, the “concepts of evil and hatred” will cease to exist. Humans – all 340 billion of them sprinkled across the universe – will have evolved into immortal beings, and they will be living alongside extraterrestrials in peace and harmony. They will even possess the ability to literally converse with God.

Once humanity reaches the highest level of enlightenment, the universe, along with all the life within it, will implode in 5079.

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Other books about Baba Vanga on Amazon

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